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thought leadership

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Lifelong learning builds a better workforce

In IBJ's Thought Leadership roundtable, leaders of Eleven Fifty Academy and The Orchard School discuss the future of education, the importance of diversity, and how a healthy approach to learning prepares students for the workforce.

Q: What lessons did your school learn in 2020 that will be helpful post-pandemic?

SHERRI HELVIE: We learned the true importance of our progressive pedagogy. Our model of teaching and learning provided a comfortable space for our teachers and students to face inevitable challenges head-on.

Perhaps the most important thing we learned is that today's students are incredibly resilient. Unlike any other generation in the past century, students have had to adjust

to almost every aspect of the ways they experience education. These challenges will create opportunities that will only make them stronger. It's important for educators to show compassion and focus on the well-being of students while honoring what each of them needs.

JONATHAN HUER: Eleven Fifty Academy was able to maintain its hands-on, immersive workplace experience even as our courses went online. The virtual experience enabled us to accommodate students from 20 states and an international student without compromising our competitive

advantage in training an in-demand tech workforce. As it became evident our online experiment was a success, we decided to continue to incorporate this into our courses for the future.

We teach tech, so Eleven Fifty Academy built the technology pieces we needed. Our ability to create and build technology gave us an advantage over other schools, and we can continue to use and improve these technologies for the future. The real challenge is battling negative perceptions of these new ways of learning.

Q: What type of professional development opportunities will be most helpful for teachers who just spent most of a year teaching remotely?

JONATHAN HUER: As instructors and teachers return to in-person education, it is imperative to be compassionate, as the pandemic has taken an emotional toll on all of us. Eleven Fifty Academy engaged with a professional growth coach, Dr. Linda Bush, who has helped us navigate these challenging times. We also provided private support services to all our instructors to make sure they could navigate their personal situations with success. Social and emotional support is important for organizations. Self-care should be a priority, as well as extending this grace and support to students.

SHERRI HELVIE: With or without a pandemic, the social and emotional well-being of all students should always be a top priority. It will be especially crucial in the next couple of years for teachers to meet students where they are. Professional development programs that emphasize social and emotional support will continue to be key as we plan for the years ahead. At Orchard, all of our teachers were trained in Responsive Classroom (a student-centered, social and emotional learning approach to teaching and discipline) in August before we launched the school year, providing a common framework and language for our teachers and students.

Q: Another hallmark of 2020 was a new emphasis on equity and inclusion. What should schools be doing to keep diversity, equity, and inclusion top-of-mind?

SHERRI HELVIE: Schools should continue to have courageous conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion with their students, teachers, families, and board members. Too many times fear holds us back—fear that we'll say the wrong thing, or not use quite the right language, or that our intentions will be misunderstood.

Our Dean of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is a partner for our faculty as we do the ongoing work of curriculum and lesson planning. Encouraging students, even from a very young age, to think about "Who am I? How do I see the world? And how do others see the world?" encourages them to empathize with others and find connections with people who may have very different lived experiences.

We have also created a DEI Coordinator role to reach out to other organizations and communities within Indianapolis and to work with families through the admissions process.

JONATHAN HUER: While Eleven Fifty Academy has historically been inclusive, we have progressively amped up our efforts through proactive outreach. It is so important to create a talent funnel in all disciplines, especially in tech education, to leverage opportunities for everyone. Through collaborations with Martin University, Eastern Star Church, InnoPower, Rooted School, The Indianapolis Recorder, Be Nimble, Goodwill Industries, and grants (Thanks to the Lilly Endowment and Microsoft!) to target "most vulnerable populations," we are working hard to leverage tech as the great equalizer for people of color. We need to remember that DEI efforts begin with young learners. We need to inspire students and show them what's possible. "If you see me, you can be me" is key, so we emphasize mentorship and visibility of individuals in tech careers.

Q: What are the most important pieces of a child or adult's educational journey?


JONATHAN HUER: Cultivating curiosity and a thirst for learning is important for overall growth. For younger children, reading and writing is key in order to access the world of knowledge (often via Google). Long term, digital fluency and information literacy are crucial.



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Participating in global discourse requires both the ability to share in words, pictures, and video; and the ability to discern the words, pictures, and videos of others. And of course, technical proficiency is important to thrive in the jobs of the future.

SHERRI HELVIE: One of the most important things you can do for children is to honor their natural curiosity at a young age. This will spark a love of learning that will stay with them for the rest of their lives. The best way to ensure this happens daily is to find a learning environment with expert, joyful teachers who are passionate about their craft. They are key partners in creating a strong foundation for a love of learning. Because when students love what they're doing, the sky's the limit for academic success.

Q: How is your institution preparing students for careers/jobs that are yet to be invented?

SHERRI HELVIE: For nearly a century at Orchard, we've built our curriculum around independent thought and expression, critical thinking, problem-solving, persistence, hands-on learning, and collaboration. As the landscape of the workforce continues to evolve and change, these are the skills that not only prepare students for a fast-paced world but also for high school, college, and life. Orchard graduates are everything from CEOs to set designers in Hollywood, but most importantly, Orchard grads are active citizens using their progressive education to help make the world a better place.

JONATHAN HUER: Learning how to learn is an important foundation for a career in technology. We use a gradual release model that slowly, but steadily increases the expectations of the individual learner. We want them to be independent problem solvers who will be successful in their careers. New technology builds upon itself, and with the foundational elements our graduates can figure

out the thinking behind the technology and use their knowledge to solve the world's problems.

Q: How important are certificates, basic degrees, and advanced degrees in the workforce today?

JONATHAN HUER: Higher education has been saying the bachelor's degree is the new high school diploma. Meanwhile, micro-credentials and the need for granular skills recognition has become the "next big thing." The reality is companies want both. Workers need the necessary tech skills and the critical thinking, communication, and problem solving to thrive in a competitive environment.

Employers value degrees, but they critically need employees who have the concrete skills to be impactful on day one. This is why Eleven Fifty Academy partners with many higher ed institutions to provide the technical side of this equation, as skill-based hiring practices are increasingly more popular. It's an on-demand world: workers need the education they need at the speed, time, and mode of their choosing, which is why Eleven Fifty Academy is a critical player.

SHERRI HELVIE: Credentials are important in that they show a person's level of training and dedication to their craft. But people are much more than their degrees and certificates. The key factors are passion and commitment. We've had extraordinarily talented teachers with specialties and expertise in fields outside of education who have been truly impactful in their teaching—because of their real-world experience and joyful pursuit of learning.

Q: Many people are concerned about return on investment when it comes to their education. How should they deal with that concern?

SHERRI HELVIE: When investing in your child's education, put who

they are as a learner at the center of your planning. Find the educational environment that will motivate them to fully engage their curiosity and joy. If you lead with those priorities, you will always do right by your child.

JONATHAN HUER: Paying for an education, whether a tech bootcamp or other program, can be a challenge and must be done mindfully. This all relates to diversity and inclusion as well. Our founder, Scott Jones, has worked hard with state and local leaders to create the Progressive Income Share Agreement, or PISA—a zero-interest lending mechanism to "pay it forward" and skill up a tech workforce in Indiana. This means we, as a training provider, are on the same side as the student. Our goals are aligned. We succeed when they succeed. An Eleven Fifty Academy student who graduates from our software or web development courses completes their education 16X faster than a four-year degree at a fraction of the cost yet with similar outcomes. Our average starting salary is over \$55,000, with increases for each year of experience.

Q: What radical out-of-the-box things could Indiana be doing to compete with the coasts for high value, high impact careers?

JONATHAN HUER: There is no silver bullet, but the Academy's work to skill up thousands of Hoosiers

in tech fields is allowing Indiana to better compete. Keeping curriculum relevant to the jobs that are being created—not only now, but in the future—is critically important.

Eleven Fifty Academy's employer partners tend to have immediate needs, which is why we engage our Corporate Advisory Board for input into our curriculum on an ongoing basis. We educate for the jobs available now and careers of the future. Employers are brought into the classroom to help teach our students. Our employer partners help students learn job-hunting skills, too, by conducting "mock interviews" and trial runs of the tests and assessment tools that local employers depend upon.

SHERRI HELVIE: The pandemic has reinforced the importance of making it easy to get outside for our health and well-being. We need more public spaces where we can come together and connect. Communities that are more walkable and bikeable allow people to engage with nature, and with other people from inside and outside their own neighborhoods. Indiana can take full advantage of our ample outdoor and green spaces and make it easy for people to get outdoors and use them. That has become a clear priority for professionals who have the ability to live anywhere in the country. I predict that with the right planning and infrastructure, we'll see a lot more families relocating here from the coasts. ●



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Dr. Sherri C. Helvie is the ninth Head of School in The Orchard School's nearly century-long history of progressive education in Indianapolis. She has more than 20 years of experience serving students in grades K-12 and post-secondary education, most recently as the Assistant Head of Gateway School in Santa Cruz, California.



Dr. Jonathan B. Huer, chief learning officer for Eleven Fifty Academy, is a global leader in educational technology and media. He is an Apple Distinguished Educator, Adobe Education Leader, was twice named a Campus Technology Innovator, and was the 2014 Mira TechPoint winner for Tech Educator of the Year.



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